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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 005725

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [ECON](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: GOJ APPROVAL RATING RISES IN POLL, BUT HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

REF: A. AMMAN 5131
B. AMMAN 4555
C. AMMAN 3288
D. AMMAN 1784
E. 03 AMMAN 7804

Classified By: DCM David M. Hale for reasons 1.5 (b) (d)

SUMMARY

[¶1.](#) (C) The government of Prime Minister Faisal al-Fayez enjoyed a rise in public approval ratings, according to an opinion poll conducted 200 days after the government's formation. The poll director attributed this development to low initial expectations and a combination of one-time factors, and predicted a drop in the government's popularity absent reduced poverty and unemployment. The GOJ has attempted to bolster its image via the media, but Jordanians continue to grumble privately about corruption and government shortcomings while feeling less free to express their views publicly. End Summary.

ON THE RISE

[¶2.](#) (U) A poll by the Center for Strategic Studies (CSS), a think-tank affiliated with the University of Jordan, conducted 200 days after the formation of Prime Minister Faisal al-Fayez's cabinet, showed a marked increase in positive public opinion of the government's performance. Out of 1,405 respondents polled for the national sample, 23.3 percent thought that the government was able to "shoulder its responsibilities to a great extent," compared to only 15.9 percent surveyed in February after the government had been in office 100 days (see ref d). Among 721 opinion leaders (including senior officials, business leaders, prominent journalists, academics and heads of professional associations), this percentage increased from 22.8 to 31.8 percent over the same time period.

[¶3.](#) (U) Both samples showed continued doubt over the government's ability to improve economic conditions. Among opinion leaders, only 35.5 percent polled said the government would succeed in combating poverty, compared to 37.6 percent of the general public. The issue of unemployment elicited similar numbers, with 39.1 percent of opinion leaders and 45.2 percent of the national sample saying the government would be successful in reducing unemployment. These figures are little changed since the February poll. Over 90 percent of all respondents said price hikes on fuel derivatives and the sales tax increase had placed an additional burden on their household budgets.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

[¶4.](#) (C) Given the unpopular fuel and tax hikes (see ref d), the poll numbers indicating increased confidence in the government came as a surprise. Dr. Fares Braizat, director of the CSS polling unit, noted to PolOff that the ratings "had nowhere else to go but up" as the February numbers were some of the lowest in the eight-year history of the CSS polls. Braizat further attributed the rise to the following one-time factors: King Abdullah's May visit to the U.S. (trumpeted, at palace direction, in the press as a resounding success), the GOJ decision to provide national health insurance to all Jordanian children under the age of six and to more than 300,000 needy citizens, announcement of the extension of the Saudi oil grant to Jordan, and a wave of nationalism prompted by the foiling of a terrorist plot to bomb high-profile targets in Amman (see ref c).

[¶5.](#) (C) Braizat said that the current government was more "media savvy" than its predecessors and quick to publicize its actions that might register positively with the public. Major Jordanian media outlets were complicit in this PR campaign, according to Braizat, as evidenced by the gushing praise heaped on the King upon his return from the U.S. in May and the hype surrounding the terrorist plot (see ref b). Braizat opined that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for the GOJ to generate as much favorable

publicity for itself before the next CSS poll (to be conducted in September), and predicted that the approval ratings were "bound to go down" without noticeable progress in combating poverty, unemployment and corruption (the three issues of most concern to poll respondents).

PUBLIC IMAGE VS. PRIVATE GRISES

16. (C) Conscious of its public image, the GOJ has actively controlled the fallout of the April fuel and price increases. It announced, for example, that there would be no further fuel price hikes this year and decided at the end of June to raise municipal employees' salaries on the same basis approved in April for military personnel and GOJ civil servants. PM al-Fayez continues to make the rounds holding discussions with MPs, civil society organizations, and other groups in an attempt to bolster the GOJ's standing. King Abdullah has weighed in on the government's behalf several times, publicly expressing his confidence in the ministers and stating as recently as July 6 that government economic programs "are on the right path."

17. (C) Despite the government's PR efforts, and in contrast to the improved opinion poll numbers, Jordanians continue to gripe privately about their government. Stories of alleged government corruption (reported septel) are ever present while the recent scandal over the leaking of questions on the secondary school Tawjihi exam (see ref a) reflected poorly on the GOJ. West Amman's salons are abuzz with criticism of the government, and the recent issuance of signed, public manifestos against the GOJ's Iraq policy indicates that opposition elements see new opportunity to exploit the public mood. However, public attacks on government policy remain rare. According to public polls conducted by the University of Jordan's Center for Strategic Studies, 69 percent of Jordanians in autumn 1999 (at the beginning of King Abdullah's reign) said that they were afraid of openly criticizing the royal family or high government officials. This number increased to 83 percent in fall of 2003.

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